



**Cancer Society New Zealand
Te Rōpū Mate Pukupuku o Aotearoa**

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Vital Health Decision

The Cancer Society is welcoming the introduction of the human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine onto the immunisation schedule, saying the vaccine has been approved and available, but not universally accessible in New Zealand, since 2006.

"Each year in New Zealand about 200 women develop cervical cancer and about 66 die of the disease," said Health Promotion Manager, Dr Jan Pearson. As far as we are concerned including this vaccine on the schedule is a welcome move on the part of the Ministry of Health.

The vaccine has the potential to protect women from being infected with four types of HPV (human papilloma virus) two of which can cause cervical cancer.

These types are common and widespread in the community, with up to 75 per cent of people being infected at some time in their lives. Most of these infections resolve without treatment. In some cases, however, the infection persists and can lead to the development of cancer.

"The vaccine offers the potential to prevent cervical cancer so it is an important medical breakthrough with major benefits for future generations of women.

"As the vaccine is of greatest benefit to those who have not yet been infected with HPV, its protection is best if given before sexual activity begins. To be on the safe side we need to be looking at 11 year olds and this will require a great deal

of education and information being provided to parents to help them make a decision, on behalf of their daughters.

“Including the HPV vaccine on the immunisation schedule ensures equitable access to the vaccine and that means that those who are at increased risk of developing and dying from cervical cancer can be immunised. Currently the vaccine cost of \$450 - \$500 is a barrier to the majority of New Zealand families.

Dr Pearson goes on to say that because the vaccine will not protect against all HPV and because not all cervical cancers are linked to HPV it is essential all women between the ages of 20 and 70 who are or have been sexually active continue to have cervical smear tests every three years.

Those seeking further information about HPV vaccines are advised to phone the Cancer Society's help line at 0800 CANCER (226 237).

For more information:

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